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Oversight Committee Passes Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act

Washington, DC – Chairman Edolphus “Ed Towns (D-NY) today announced that the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform approved H.R. 2517, the “Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act of 2009. The legislation makes available certain employment benefits, including health care, to the same-sex domestic partners of federal employees. H.R. 2517 promotes equality and fairness in the federal workforce, and strengthens the civil service.

“The Oversight and Government Reform Committee has a duty to oversee the federal workforce. The Committee is fulfilling that role, and taking an important step toward a better, stronger, and more inclusive workforce by advancing this legislation, said Chairman Towns.

“I’m delighted with the Committee’s action today and grateful for Chairman Towns’ support and leadership on this issue that affects so many government employees and their families, said Representative Tammy Baldwin (WI-02), Co-Chair of the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus and author of the bill. On May 20, 2009, H.R. 2517 was introduced by Rep. Baldwin and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-18). The legislation was reported to full committee on July 24, 2009 by Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia Subcommittee. Companion legislation has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and Susan Collins (R-ME).

H.R. 2517 makes employment benefits available to the same-sex domestic partners of federal employees, former employees, and annuitants. In order to receive these benefits, the legislation requires an employee with a same sex domestic partner to certify in an affidavit that his or her relationship satisfies the criteria set out in the Act for establishing a domestic partnership. Once a domestic partnership is established, the employee and the domestic partner are eligible to receive benefits, including health care insurance. The employee and his or her partner are also subject to the same ethical, financial disclosure and conflict of interest obligations that apply to a married federal employee and his or her spouse.

Chairman Towns is once again demonstrating his strong commitment to improving federal workforce policies that will enable the federal government to compete for talent with the private sector. Already this year, under the Chairman’s leadership, the Committee passed H.R. 626, the “Federal Employees Paid Parental Leave Act of 2009 that responds to the needs of tens of thousands of working families in the federal government by providing 4 weeks of paid parental leave for the birth, adoption, or fostering of a child.

“We must begin to implement workplace benefits that allow us to be as attractive, if not more attractive, than the private sector. By doing so, we can create the most skilled and effective workforce for the future, added Chairman Towns.

“Extending benefits to the domestic partners of federal employees is more than a matter of fairness. As a majority of Fortune 500 companies have already demonstrated, equality and diversity in the workplace boost productivity and help attract and keep the most qualified employees, said Rep. Baldwin.

The legislation is now set to move to the House floor for debate.

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